

Lesser celandine

Ranunculus Ficaria (verna)



Lesser celandine is a small, low-growing perennial herb in the buttercup family.

Leaves: glossy, dark-green and heart-shaped with long stalks.

Flowers: shiny, yellow star-like flowers with eight to twelve petals.

As one of the first flowers to appear after winter, they provide an important nectar source for queen bumblebees, and other pollinators emerging from hibernation, and other early insects

In fact, the 21st of February is known as "Celandine Day" as this is when peak flowering has been observed to begin. In 1795, the renowned naturalist Gilbert White noted that the first celandines usually appeared in his Hampshire village of Selborne on this date and a similar result has been noted over the centuries ever since. It was once thought that you could use lesser celandine to predict the weather as they close their petals before raindrops.

They are mentioned in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. When Aslan returned and the woodland turns from winter to spring, the ground was covered in all directions with yellow celandine flowers.

Wordsworth was such a fan of the lesser celandine, he wrote three poems about them: *The Small Celandine*, *To the Same Flower* and *To the Small Celandine*.

There's a flower that shall be mine, 'Tis the little Celandine.

William Wordsworth, "To the Small Celandine"

Celandine is the floral equivalent of the swallow: both reappear around the same time and herald the coming of spring. Infact, the word 'celandine' comes from the Greek *chelidon* meaning 'swallow'. This also gave the lesser celandine the name 'spring messenger'. Aptly enough, the Victorians used it to symbolise "joys to come".

One of its local names is "pilewort" since the herb was given for haemorrhoids. This was based on the doctrine of signatures since the knobbly tubers were thought to resemble piles.

Despite sharing the name, it isn't actually related to the greater celandine. Lesser celandine is a member of the buttercup family. Greater celandine is related to the poppy.